

From The Pastor

How would you live if you thought the Lord was coming any day? What are the essentials of the Christian life as they are described in the Acts of the Apostles?

First, 'the day of the Lord' is both coming and already here. The day of the Lord is everyday. God is always present, and always coming to us. This theme was introduced during the Advent season when we were called to prepare for the coming of the Lord: to not be surprised by the day of the Lord's coming. That day is now here. It is the Resurrected life we share in Jesus through the eyes of faith that 'sees' his presence within and among us.

In the presence of the Lord, and yet still anticipating the fullness of his coming, how might we live our lives in the knowledge of faith? The early believers 'devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.'

To know and live in the spiritual awareness of the risen Christ demands an ongoing nourishment and strengthening of that life within us. 'Devoting themselves to the teaching of the Apostles' means that these early disciples shared with one another their experience of the risen Lord. They pondered the scriptures and found confirmation of their experience in all that Jesus had promised them. They must have pondered and reflected what it all meant and what they were now to do with the new understanding and life they had in Jesus.

To strengthen their experience and call in the Lord, they gathered together. They formed a community and moved in a spirit of love and desire to make the Lord known. At the center of their communal identity they broke bread; they shared in the Eucharist and recognized the presence of the Lord. Prayer, an openness of mind and heart to God in faith, characterized their stance before God and one another. All these activities furthered their knowing and acting in the presence of the Lord. Through their activities, others came to join them, and the gospel and its power came to be known throughout the world.

Prior to all this gathering and forming of community, the disciples had to first recover from the shock of the Lord's death, and come to realize that he was indeed alive. This realization was a movement from darkness to light. These themes are intentionally creational. John, the gospel writer, makes clear that the Resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of a new creation.

The disciples are in the chaos of fear, locked behind closed doors. This is an apt description of humanity itself prior to the light of the risen Christ. Fear causes inner chaos, binds the ability to love, and hinders trust. In this scene there is no faith.

Jesus appears, through the locked door, and speaks a word of peace. We will never have proof of the kind of physical body or presence in which Jesus was recognized. We know his 'appearance' was powerful and real. His word of peace calmed the fears and panic of the disciples, and they rejoiced. The presence of Jesus is so real to them that he is known to be alive. Whatever the material presence of Jesus consisted of, his spiritual presence was powerful and convincing. He was alive and these disciples were dramatically changed by his appearance.

The eyes of these believers are opened to a new way of seeing. Fear is lifted, and love and trust return. Again, Jesus speaks to them a word of peace, followed by a commissioning. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you. He breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit"... The divine life of Jesus is bestowed upon his followers. Recalling the divine action of creation, the breath of God is blown into his creatures, 'and man became a living being'.

Sharing in the power of divine life and love, we now have the commission to forgive sins. Forgiveness is a divine action rooted in divine love. Confirmed in the divine life we share in Christ, we are now to continue the forgiving work he began in his personal ministry. We are the next action of God in the world through the person of Christ now present in us through the Spirit.

As the Father sent Jesus, now Jesus is sending us. We are called to inform others of the gospel so that all may come to know and share in the joy of Christ. This is the work and identity of the community that is the Church. It is why we gather in community to share experience of faith and listen to the Word of God. Because the work of forgiveness is difficult, we gather at the table and

break the bread that is Jesus. We pray for and with one another. The Spirit and the life of Jesus is alive among us through our forgiveness and mutual charity.

Blest are we who have not seen, but have believed. Physically we have not seen Jesus in the way Thomas and the others may have seen him. Yet, in faith, and with spiritual eyes we have seen the Lord and the power of his presence in and through one another. May our mutual love and forgiveness make this experience ever the more real for all.

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